Worship Resources for November 12th, 2017—Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25 and Psalm 78:1-7; Amos 5:18-24 and Psalm 70; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13

Narrative Lectionary: Amos: Justice Rolls Down, 1:1-2; 5:14-15, 21-24 (John 7:37-38)

As we near the end of this season after Pentecost, we have followed the origins of the Hebrews from Abraham and Sarah, through their descendants as a large family into Egypt, from Moses leading the people out of Egypt and out of slavery, until these final chapters of Joshua, Moses’ successor, who is about to lead the people into the land promised them. Joshua gives the people a choice as to what god they will serve, reminding them that the Lord is the God who was with their ancestor Abraham and has been with them as a people all along. Joshua and the people choose to follow God alone, and Joshua renews the covenant.

The psalmist reminds the people in psalm 78 that God is the one who established a covenant with the people. The psalmist speaks as if a prophet, reminding the people the promise to teach all they know to their children, of what God has done for them, of the law God has given them. The psalmist calls upon the people to continue to train up the next generation, so they can set their hope on God.

The prophet Amos asks why would one want the day of the Lord? The day of judgment is not something we should desire, because it is a day we all are judged. Amos, dealing with leaders who wanted to hold another festival to God as an attempt to please God, instead calls upon the people to turn away from wickedness and to let justice roll down like waters. God doesn’t care for the festivals and feasts, but rather how we live. Celebrating the day of the Lord is counter-intuitive to Amos. We ought to not want the day of judgment, but rather to change our ways to avoid our own condemnation. Let justice and righteousness flow in our daily lives.

The desperate psalmist pleads to God for deliverance in Psalm 70. The psalmist cries out that those who seek their life will be put to shame, that those who desire harm will receive dishonor, but that those who seek God’s ways will thrive.

Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 a vision of the dead rising in Christ. Paul speaks of those who are left alive rising and meeting Christ, who is descending, in the clouds. Since heaven was thought of being above the earth in a flat-world view, this vision is of the dividing line between heaven and earth being erased, of where life and death meet, and Christ embraces them. Paul encourages the church in Thessalonica to continue to encourage one another, knowing that the day of Christ will come someday.

Jesus tells the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids in Matthew 25:1-13. The bridegroom is delayed in coming to the wedding, but the wise bridesmaids have brought oil for their lamps. The foolish did not, and were not ready when the bridegroom came for their lamps had gone out. However, the parable tells us that even the wise had fallen asleep in their waiting. Even the most faithful among us get tired of waiting. But when the time came, the foolish were off trying to get more oil and the wise were able to greet the bridegroom and were welcomed into the wedding. Jesus then warns the disciples to keep awake, for they know not the day or the hour.

The Narrative Lectionary overlaps with the Revised Common Lectionary on the prophet Amos. Amos was a shepherd in Israel, and implored the people to seek justice and righteousness over being likeable. The leaders of Israel in that time wanted to be liked by the people, so they worshipped other gods alongside the Lord, and had lavish festivals and feasts. Amos says that God hates their festivals and assemblies, but would rather they practice justice and live into righteousness. Right worship is not about how incredible a celebration you have, but about how you live out your faith.

Jesus is speaking to the people on the last day of the Festival of Booths in John 7:37-38. As part of the festival, for seven days water was carried into the temple as a reminder of the time God brought forth water from the rock in the desert. But Jesus declares that he is the river of living water.

Choose who you will serve. Do you serve the ways of the world, which call us to use the resources we have been given for ourselves, for lavish celebrations that make ourselves feel good, or do we use what we have to build up the reign of God? Do we follow a set of rules or a way of life? It is too easy for us as Christians to make this divide between Jews and Christians when it comes to the law, but Jesus was also speaking to the disciples to keep awake. Jesus continues to speak to us to live into our faith in right-living, and by doing justice.

Call to Worship

Our songs and praises are meaningless,

**Unless we live out their meaning in our lives.**

Our celebrations and worship are empty,

**Unless we live our lives as an act of worship to God.**

Worship is not about this hour alone;

**Worship is how we live our lives for God.**

Come, enter this time of worship to praise God,

**And leave this place continuing to worship God in our daily life.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

We confess O God that we have had other gods before you. We have worshiped our own image; how we look to other people. We have sought worldly idols of success and wealth. We have followed the commandments of the world to put ourselves first and to help others only if it benefits us. Forgive us for following the false idols of the world, O God. Forgive us for worshiping our own image. Forgive us for not coming before You in humility, knowing that we have done wrong. Help us to repent, to turn away from the ways of the world, and to seek You and Your ways. In the name of Christ, who will come again into our lives and into our world in a new way, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God’s steadfast love endures forever. There is no place we can go where God’s love cannot find us. There is nothing we can do that God’s love cannot redeem us. God’s love is eternal, so surrender yourself to God. God’s faithfulness endures forever, so give yourself up to God. Know God’s love, and go and love others. Amen.

Prayer

Holy One, You make every moment in our lives sacred and worthwhile, from our first breath, until the time we become eternal with You. You have shaped the leaves and given them their bright colors as they fall to the earth. You cause the bulbs deep in the earth to blossom with promise. You cause our lungs to fill with air and breathe life into our bones. You are Holy, and this earth is holy. You are holy, and our bodies are holy. You are holy, and the air we breathe is holy. You are Holy, and we are holy. Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty. Holy, Holy, Holy, are we Your people. Help us to be holy, and whole. Amen.